



## Archivists and Family Historians: local authority record repositories and the family history user group<sup>1</sup>

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In almost all record repositories, of whatever type, a large and seemingly increasing proportion of users are family historians. Individual repositories have responded to the demands made by family historians in a number of different ways, depending on the circumstances in which they find themselves, and, to an extent, on the personal attitudes of those making policy decisions. However, while all those who work in record offices and archive services are aware of the importance of this user group—in terms of size, if nothing else—and while major policy decisions are made by repositories in order to accommodate their needs, no detailed research seems to have been carried out in this area,<sup>2</sup> and no discussion (at least in print) seems to be taking place on archival attitudes and policies towards family historians, and on the most appropriate ways to provide for their needs.

A brief survey of past and current writing on archival theory and repository management reveals that family historians are rarely mentioned. Looking at the titles of articles in the *Journal of the Society of Archivists* and *Archives* over the past 30 years, only one appears to contain any mention of family history or genealogy—a short report in *Archives* on the annual conference of the British Records Association of 1985 which had as its theme 'Records, Genealogy and Historical Research'.<sup>3</sup> Books on archive administration similarly have very little to say on family history and its impact on record repository usage. That nothing was written on family historians in the early years of local authority repositories is understandable: users were few, and family historians were fewer. Fowler makes no mention at all of genealogists in *The Care of County Muniments*,<sup>4</sup> published in 1928, while Emmison, in 1957 writing a report on the Essex Record Office under the significant title *Archives for All*, has only one passing reference to 'historians of their own family'.<sup>5</sup> Twenty years later, however, when numbers of users, and with them numbers of family historians, were increasing, books on archival management still had little or nothing to say on family

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historians: Hodson's *The Administration of Archives*, published in 1972,<sup>6</sup> has no references to genealogists or family historians in the index, while Cook's *Archives Administration* published 5 years later, has only passing references to this user group.<sup>7</sup> What is more surprising is that a series of seminars held in 1993 on the subject of archivists and researchers, the papers from which were subsequently published,<sup>8</sup> should contain no discussion of family historians as archival researchers. The concept of 'researcher' in these seminars seems to have been limited to academic users, and there are in fact only two references to family historians in the papers. One is a reference to a stereotypical 'amateur genealogist on safari', cited as an example of 'problems of understanding',<sup>9</sup> the other is a passing reference to the fact that almost all the volunteers on an indexing project organised by the Friends of the PRO were family historians.<sup>10</sup>

Family historians, then, are almost invisible in archival literature. Anyone who has any contact with record offices and archive services knows that they are far from invisible in practice. But exactly how large a user group are they, and are they of the same importance in all record repositories? What impact have they had on repositories, especially on the sources and services they provide? And what do archivists think of family historians as a user group, and of how record repositories have responded to their needs—indeed, should they be responding to their needs at all? No discussion of these issues can take place without some attempt to establish basic facts and sound out current opinion among practising archivists. To this end, in May and June 1997 local authority record repositories in England and Wales<sup>11</sup> were surveyed by means of a short questionnaire (see Appendix 1) which asked for information on numbers of users and on the sources and services provided for family historians; it also included an optional, open-ended question on archival attitudes to family historians as a user group. One hundred and twenty-five questionnaires were sent out, covering almost all local authority record repositories, including traditional 'county' record offices, library-based services of various types, and local history centres; 115 questionnaires were returned, an excellent response rate of 92%. A list of the repositories to which the questionnaire was sent is given in Appendix 2.<sup>12</sup>

The survey sought first to establish an estimate for the number of family historians using local authority record repositories, and their proportion relative to other user groups, through two related questions (questions 1 and 2 on the questionnaire). It became obvious from the answers given to question 1, that different practices in counting and recording user visits<sup>13</sup> mean that the figures for different repositories are not strictly comparable; however, overall the figures present a reasonably accurate picture. The survey revealed a figure of 617 338 for the total number of searcher visits made in 1996 to the 106 record repositories responding to this question, giving a mean average of 5824 per repository; this figure however, conceals a wide variation from a minimum of 95 (in Thanet branch archive, Kent, situated in a library and open only 1 day a week) to a maximum of 18 450 (in London Metropolitan Archives). Figure 1 shows the distribution between these two extremes, with the largest number of repositories having between 2500 and 5000 searcher visits, and the next largest group being those with less than 2500 visits; only 18 repositories (17% of the total) report over 10 000 visits.

As far as the question on the proportion of genealogists is concerned, 11 repositories were unable to give a figure at all, and a considerable number were unable to give an accurate figure, but felt able to hazard a guess; other offices based their figure on surveys of customer use, or on users' declarations of purpose of visit—a far more

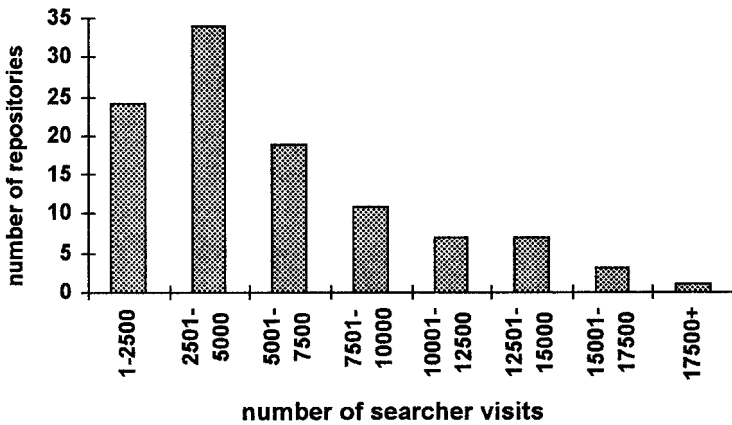


FIGURE 1. Record repositories by number of searcher visits.

accurate measure than guesswork, though probably still not entirely accurate. Overall, the figures for genealogists as a proportion of record repository users are probably considerably less accurate than the figures for total numbers of users, and should be treated with some caution; however, despite these problems, they do indicate the order of magnitude of the use of record repositories by family historians. The figures given by repositories for family historians as a percentage of total users range from 10% to 90%, the mean figure being 57%.<sup>14</sup> However, in this case distribution between minimum and maximum is very heavily weighted towards the upper end of the scale (see Figure 2): only 11 repositories have less than 40% of users who are family historians, while for three-quarters of record repositories, the proportion is 50% or more.

The next question addressed by the survey was how far (if at all) repositories have attempted to meet the needs of family historians by acquiring copy and non-archival sources. Questions on holdings of four such sources—census returns, the International Genealogical Index (IGI), the General Register Office (GRO) index of

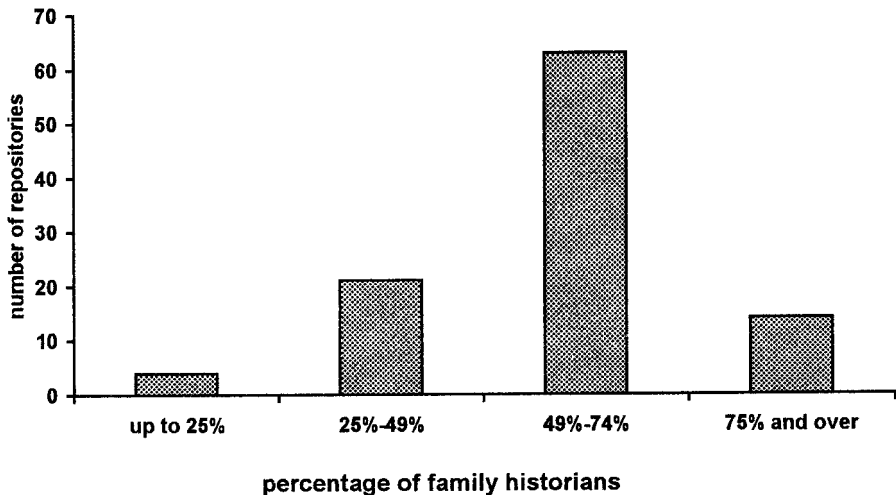


FIGURE 2. Record repositories by percentage of family historians.

births, marriages and deaths, and the 1881 census personal name index—were included in the questionnaire. These sources were considered to be of particular significance, partly because of their prime importance to family historians, but also because their acquisition may indicate something of the policies and attitudes of a particular record repository towards family historians. Census returns for the area covered by the repository can be seen as a logical extension of the repository's own holdings of local archival material; moreover, they are of interest to other users apart from family historians. Similarly, the IGI, compiled in large part from church records, can be regarded as complementing and extending a repository's own holdings of parish registers, to which it can provide a partial index. The other two sources, by contrast, are not local, and their purchase can be justified only in terms of providing a resource for family historians: the GRO indexes have no natural link to any other material held by record repositories (with the possible exception of vaccination registers); while the acquisition of the 1881 census personal name index for the *whole* of England and Wales (as opposed to the index for the local area only), indicates a definite commitment on the part of a repository to providing national sources for family historians.

Analysis of the responses to the questionnaire shows that a large proportion of repositories hold the IGI and local census returns (82% and 76%, respectively), while far smaller proportions hold the GRO indexes and the 1881 census personal name index for all England and Wales (23% and 25%, respectively). Only 14 offices (12% of the total) hold all four sources.<sup>15</sup> There may be two reasons for this: one is the cost of buying the sources, in particular the GRO indexes;<sup>16</sup> the other is that repositories are more willing to acquire sources which link directly to their own holdings and their own area, and sources which are of interest to a range of users. A quarter of repositories, however, have acquired national sources which are of use almost exclusively to family historians.

Repositories have also responded to the demands of family historians by developing various services. Four of these different types of services—the provision of leaflets, free postal research, paid postal research, and the running of family history fairs, courses, or open days—were examined in this survey. Eighty-eight per cent of all repositories were found to produce some form of leaflet for family historians. This is not surprising: family history leaflets, giving both general information on how to trace a family tree, and specific information on the sources and records held by the repository, can often provide a ready reply to postal enquiries, and help personal visitors to make use of the repository with a minimum of help from staff. Such leaflets (sometimes a series of leaflets on different topics) may now form part of a 'customer relations' or 'outreach' programme, promoting the work and resources of the repository, but many have their origins in an attempt to deal efficiently and economically with a large quantity of repetitive enquiries.

As far as postal research is concerned, 50% of repositories are prepared to carry out free postal research, although in the vast majority of cases this is of a very limited nature, while 63% of repositories offer some sort of paid postal research service. The provision of a postal research service, like the production of leaflets, can be seen in some ways as an act of self-defence, an attempt to deal in the most cost-effective way with the ever-growing demand for information from family historians unable to visit the repository in person. The organisation by the repository of family history open days, courses or fairs, on the other hand, indicates a rather greater commitment towards family historians—although it may also be a reflection of the general policy

of the office towards outreach work. Surprisingly, then, 48% of repositories were found to provide some such sort of family history open days or courses.

Finally, two questions were asked on the amount charged for paid postal research (where such a service was offered), and on the amount (if any) charged for use of sources. Of the 70 repositories which offer a paid postal research service, most charge a straightforward hourly rate, but some charge a different rate for the first hour or half hour, and some limit the amount of research that can be carried out. The minimum amount charged was found to be £10, and the maximum £24; most repositories, however, charge between £15 and £20 for an hour's research, and the mean charge is £16.31.

Very few repositories charge for the use of material which they hold. Two county record offices, Gloucestershire and Devon (with its three branch offices) make a daily charge to all users of £2; both have season ticket systems and concessions for certain groups of users. Six more repositories charge for the use of microform—two for the use of any type of microform, and four for the use of the GRO indexes.<sup>17</sup> Of these six, four charge £1 per hour, one charges £1.50 for up to 4 hours, and one charges an advance booking fee of 50p per session, presumably more in an effort to control bookings than to raise money. It is worth noting that all of the six repositories which charge for the use of microform have the GRO indexes, and that four of them have all four of the sources on which questions were asked.

To summarise, the survey revealed that in all but a very few local authority record repositories family historians are the largest user group; indeed, in a substantial number of repositories they greatly outnumber all other users. Most repositories have acquired at least one copy or non-archival source used predominantly by family historians, although sources which relate to the local area, rather than national sources, are most commonly found. Most have also responded to the demands of family historians by providing services for them; most repositories provide leaflets for family historians, nearly two-thirds offer paid postal research, and almost half offer some sort of family history fairs or courses. Family historians are clearly, then, an important record repository user group. So what are the attitudes of local authority archivists towards them, and how far do they think record repository policies should be influenced by their needs? Almost all of those who returned the questionnaire responded—often at some length—to the optional open-ended question which asked for comments on these matters. A wide range of views were expressed and a number of very interesting comments were made, but two common themes emerged: that family historians as a user group are of immense value in raising the profile of record offices, and that all users should be treated equally, no matter what their area of research.

Family historians are seen by many respondents to be valuable in raising the profile of record offices competing for scarce resources. In the main, it is simply the size of the family history user group which is emphasised by respondents; at a time of financial stringency and emphasis on performance indicators, it is important that local authority repositories can point to as high a level of usage as possible to argue for development of services or to fight proposed cuts. Many observe that without family historians, seen as the 'bread and butter' of many repositories' work, searchroom figures would be very low, with serious consequences for the survival of some services. However, it is not only in terms of their numbers that family historians are relevant in raising the profile of repositories, particularly as far as elected members of local authorities are concerned: the social composition of the user group, drawn as it

is from all sectors of the community, can help to demonstrate the relevance of a record office, and show support from the widest possible public base. One respondent comments that, 'the social and cultural background of the area served by this office is such that it has been essential to develop a broad user base to avoid charges of elitism ... Our commitment to service provision for family historians is one plank in this policy.' In addition, a number of respondents remark that family historians can also act as a very influential direct pressure group on behalf of local offices, particularly useful in times of financial constraints and local government reorganisation, several respondents revealing a deep gratitude for this assistance in 'times of dire need'.

If the value of family historians in raising the profile of the repository is one of the main themes running through many of the responses, the other is the concern that family historians should be welcomed in record offices and treated in exactly the same way as other users: 'We do not differentiate between family historians and other researchers', is a typical comment. A number of respondents remark that archivists should not exercise value judgements, while others see family history as a worthwhile and legitimate area of research. Some respondents are keen to dispel totally the 'myth' of family historians being regarded as a nuisance, but others suggest that, while they themselves are impartial, there is some 'academic snobbery' to be found among archivists. It is important, of course, to differentiate between the treatment accorded to family historians in the searchroom, and the sometimes critical attitudes displayed towards them in staffrooms and informally at meetings of archivists. Few would allow what happens when 'we get together and talk shop and begin to exaggerate and stereotype' to affect their face-to-face contact with family historians.

A variety of other comments are made, and a wide range of opinions expressed. Many respondents feel that family historians can be difficult to deal with in searchrooms; they can be unprepared, have unrealistic expectations, fail to understand sources or technology, and demand an excessive amount of assistance. Most also add, however, that other types of user can be equally difficult; several suggest that it may be the sheer size of the family history user group which can make searchroom problems more acute, and that it is the repetitive nature of their enquiries which strains staff patience. One point raised is the educational backgrounds of many family historians, which may not have provided them with academic research skills. While family historians are not the only record repository users who lack these skills (and in any case should we *expect* users to possess these skills?) it is a point worth considering: family historians, as we noted above, widen a record office's user base—how far does this affect the user base in terms of level of education and literacy, and how far does this in turn influence the amount of help required in the searchroom? Such considerations may have an impact on searchroom organisation and staffing, and cannot be ignored.<sup>18</sup> This is not to suggest, of course, that a widening of the user base is to be regretted, and a number of respondents express their pleasure that family history brings a wide range of people into record offices, introducing them to 'the enjoyment and appreciation of archives' and allowing record repositories to contribute to 'life-long learning'.

On the other hand, family historians are seen by some as easier to deal with than other users; their demands may be repetitive, but they are of a consistent nature, and many of their requirements can be met by a self-service searchroom and standard leaflets and letters. The routine and repetitive nature of the demands of family historians has staffing implications, too, as several respondents point out: one

comments that professional staff deal with academic researchers, while support staff 'generally handle the day-to-day genealogical queries'; and one office reports a change in staffing structure, with two record assistants' posts replacing an archivist's post so that the archivist's time is used more effectively.

A small number of respondents mention that family historians' needs affect listing and publication priorities, and one that their requirements are borne in mind when cataloguing and indexing records. Some, however, are worried that meeting the needs of family historians can deflect resources from other areas of work, particularly cataloguing, while others were concerned that emphasis on family historians should not divert staff time and resources from other user groups, particularly educational users. Concern is also expressed over the danger of neglecting the records management side of the repository's functions.

On the question of how far local authority record repositories should provide sources and services for family historians, a range of opinions is expressed. The 'one-stop shop' for family history is a concept mentioned by several respondents: it is more convenient to the user if all the relevant sources are held together in one place. Some use the idea to argue in favour of joint archives/local studies arrangements, and a small number suggest that if separate services are to continue then it is libraries which should provide copy and non-archival sources; however, rather more argue that record repositories are best placed to provide for family historians' needs. It is pointed out that many of the sources which family historians will need to move on to after they have exhausted the basic sources are held only by record offices. One respondent comments that GRO indexes, IGI and census returns 'dovetail with the resources which the record office naturally possesses ... And who better to provide advice on the entire range of these records than archive staff?'

It is obvious from the responses from a number of repositories that it is often 'accident of history' and the availability of funds at any given time which determine whether record repositories or libraries acquire copy and non-archival sources for family historians. In some cases, however, decisions depend on local authority policy, particularly where both library and record office are the responsibility of the same authority, while in others agreements as to which institution acquires particular sources are worked out informally. In a number of cases, the question of whether the sources should be acquired by the repository does not arise, since the funds for acquiring them—and for coping with the increased number of users they would bring—are not available; several respondents indicated that they would buy copy and non-archival sources if they had the budget.

It is noticeable that almost all of the comments made by respondents are based on practical rather than theoretical considerations, summed up perhaps by the respondent who sees no harm in buying in sources which do not have particular relevance to the archival collections in an office: 'If it's useful, why not?' This emphasis on the practical, and on a pragmatic approach to policy decisions, is probably an accurate reflection of current attitudes in the archive profession in England and Wales, where the tradition of the 'scholar archivist' has all but disappeared and where, particularly in local authority repositories, management skills have become as important as archival skills and concern with anything other than day-to-day survival can seem a luxury.<sup>19</sup> There are, however, several respondents who look beyond practical issues, and comment on what they see as the role of the local authority record repository, and how this should affect attitudes and particularly policies towards family historians. For a small number of these, their perception of the role of a local authority

record repository leads them clearly to the conclusion that the repository should not acquire copy and non-archival sources, and that it 'should concentrate on its main task of preserving and making available original records'. Several respondents, however, believe that the role of a local authority record repository is such that it *should* acquire sources for family historians. 'It seems to me', writes one, 'that the "proper" work of a record office is defined by what its users want, not what its staff would like to do.' Others emphasise the fact that local authority repositories are accountable to those who fund them, and that they should serve all the public, irrespective of research interests. Between those who feel that local authority record repositories should *not* acquire copy and non-archival sources, and those who feel that they should, are those who see the acquisition of sources such as the census, the IGI or 1881 census index *for the local area* not to be in conflict with the basic purpose of local record repositories, but feel that the acquisition of national sources lies beyond their remit; such sources, they feel, should be provided by the public library service. Others, however, believe that the acquisition of national sources provides an important service for council tax-payers whose family history research may lie outside the local area.

In order to put these opposing views of the role of local authority record repositories in perspective, it is worth looking in a little more detail at the theoretical and legal foundations of these repositories. There are three points which seem relevant: the first is that the historical origins of county and many borough record offices, which were initially set up to care for county or borough records, can lead to the view that, 'The fundamental and primary responsibility of the [local government] archive service should be to the administration which it serves';<sup>20</sup> the second point is the general archival principle that, 'Our first obligation as a profession is to preserve records of enduring interest and the second is to make them available';<sup>21</sup> while the third (and arguably the most important) is that the miscellany of acts of parliament and ecclesiastical measures from which local authority record repositories derive their powers and responsibilities all stress either the link of the repository with its employing authority,<sup>22</sup> the safekeeping of a particular type of record,<sup>23</sup> or the local nature of the records which a repository may acquire.<sup>24</sup> While a repository is permitted to 'do all such things as appear to it necessary or expedient for enabling adequate use to be made of records under its control',<sup>25</sup> the legislation confirms the traditional emphasis in archival writing and theory on responsibility to the employing authority, on the local nature of the records held, and on the importance of the preservation of records, rather than any need to provide for the demands of the user.

However, two developments are affecting these traditional views. One is changes within local government. Local government reorganisation, and particularly the reduction in size or abolition of certain county councils, is in some cases ending the close relationship between the repository and its local authority, especially where joint funding arrangements are put in place. At the same time, internal reorganisation within many authorities is placing archive services in heritage or leisure departments or alongside libraries within large education departments, and hence weakening the traditional link of record offices with the main administrative departments.<sup>26</sup> The concept of interdependent departments within local authorities is, in any case, being replaced by that of separate cost centres and business units; such developments are inevitably affecting archive services. The second development is the challenging by some writers of the archival principle that preservation of records is the most important of archival tasks, and the replacement of this view with the suggestion that



users should be as important in archival thinking as records. Ann Pederson, for example, believes that archivists 'have two *equally important* responsibilities. The first is to identify, acquire and preserve records of lasting value. The second is to make these ... available for use'<sup>27</sup> (my italics); while Ian Wilson says that, 'Use and related communications tend to come last in archival thinking ... we need to move it from last to rank it with the first'.<sup>28</sup> It is interesting that the *Archives Policy for the United Kingdom* produced by the National Archives Policy Liaison Group in 1996, while repeating many traditional archival principles, lays more emphasis on the user than is to be found in other writing on archives. The first principle, for example, stresses the 'rights of the citizen' for whom 'the true facts of history'—terms rarely encountered in archival writing—should be 'preserved and made available for consultation'.<sup>29</sup> While 'outreach' and 'user services' are still seen by some as peripheral to the core functions of a local authority repository,<sup>30</sup> there is a shift in emphasis in archival thinking towards the importance of considering and responding to the needs of users, even if users are not yet central to archival theory.

Legislation, of course, remains unchanged. However, it is worth noting that the activities of local authority record repositories have always tended to anticipate, rather than follow, legislation: the 1962 Local Government (Records) Act, for example, merely gave legal basis to policies for the acquisition of local records which were already in place. Moreover, existing permissive legislation may become irrelevant to record repositories which may enjoy a different relationship to local authorities if, for example, they become a joint service with libraries, or if they operate under a service purchaser/provider agreement.

In conclusion, the survey on which this paper is based has shown the significance of family historians as a user group in local authority record repositories: well over half of all users are family historians, and repositories have responded to their needs not only by acquiring relevant copy and non-archival sources, but by introducing certain services to cope with their demands; some have also changed their staffing arrangements, cataloguing priorities or acquisition policies. In most cases this has been a pragmatic response to local conditions and user demand, although some archivists feel strongly that what they are doing is part of the function of a local authority repository. Archival literature, on the other hand, ignores this very large user group, and traditional archival theory and existing legislation, which emphasise records rather than users, and stress both the links between a local authority repository and its employing authority, and the local nature of the records which may be acquired, would seem to suggest that the acquisition of national sources and the development of certain services for family historians are not justified in principle.

However, alternative theories on archival principles and on the functions of local authority record repositories are being put forward, and external circumstances are changing; changes in legislation may follow, or existing legislation may become irrelevant to record repositories. All institutions need to change and adapt in order to remain relevant, or indeed to survive, and local authority record repositories are no exception. If those local authority archivists who believe that family historians are vital to the continued existence of local authority record repositories are correct, then paradoxically, responding to the demands of this user group will ultimately help archivists to fulfil their responsibility to the records in their care. Without this large user group, drawn from a range of social classes, funding for record repositories might be even lower than its present levels. A cost-benefit analysis of the value of family historians as a user group in a range of repositories might reveal some interesting facts

(although quantifying the benefits might present difficulties), and might result in a reappraisal of their importance in archival theory and literature—an importance which is already recognised in practice.

## NOTES

1. This paper is based on a dissertation submitted for the Society of Archivists' Diploma in Archives Administration in December 1997.
2. Two surveys of record repositories included direct or indirect questions on family historians. The first was the survey of record repositories carried out by the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts in 1984, which included a question on genealogists as a percentage of total readers—see Brian S. Smith, 'Record Repositories in 1984', *JSA*, vol 8 (1996) pp 1–16. The second was the survey by Heather Forbes published as *Local Authority Archive Services 1992* (HMSO, 1993), which asked repositories to give numbers of different categories of users where possible. Apart from these two examples, where questions on family historians were part of wider enquiries, I have been unable to find any published research on the subject.
3. John Davies, 'Report on the Annual Conference 1985', *Archives*, XVII, no 76, pp 41–42.
4. G. Herbert Fowler, *The Care of County Muniments* (London, 1928).
5. F. G. Emmison, *Archives for All. The Essex Record Office, 1950–55* (Chelmsford, 1956), p 3.
6. J. H. Hodson, *The Administration of Archives* (Oxford, 1972).
7. Michael Cook, *Archives Administration. A Manual for Intermediate and Smaller Organizations and Local Government* (Folkestone, 1977).
8. Helen Forde and Rosemary Seton (eds.), *Archivists and Researchers: Mutual Perceptions and Requirements* (London 1994).
9. Alice Prochaska, contribution to the session on 'Problems of Understanding', in Forde and Seton, p 4.
10. Lesley Wynne-Davies, contribution to the session on 'Underfunding: Problems and Solutions', Forde and Seton, p 40.
11. Other types of repositories, of course, also attract family historians, sometimes in large numbers, but the survey was restricted to local authorities in England and Wales for a number of reasons, not least the need to keep it within manageable proportions.
12. I am very grateful to all those who completed and returned the questionnaire, many taking the trouble to write lengthy comments and include copies of leaflets and pro-forma letters to illustrate their replies. Details of the methodology of the survey, and a more detailed analysis of the results than can be given here, can be obtained from the author.
13. Most significantly, some repositories were unable to give figures for the calendar year, but gave figures for the financial year 1996–97; eight repositories were unable to give any user figure at all, while a small number were able to give only estimates. All figures given in response to the question were included in the calculations made, apart from a figure for one library-based repository, produced by electronic counter, which included all visits to the local studies library as well as the archive service; to have included this figure would have seriously distorted the analysis.
14. This compares with a mean of 50% family historians in the 57 repositories which were able to give figures on user profiles to the 1992 survey (Forbes, p 19). Direct comparison with the figures given in the report on the 1984 survey are difficult, but it appears that in slightly over half of the 75 local authority repositories responding to this survey, over 50% of searchers were genealogists (Smith, p 12).
15. Since the survey was made, at least one more repository has acquired the GRO indexes.
16. It is not only the initial purchase cost which has to be considered, but the cost of providing for use of the indexes in terms of microfiche readers, seats, and staff time. On the other hand, it is possible to recoup these costs by charging for use of the indexes.
17. The six repositories are: the Glamorgan Record Office and the West Glamorgan Archive Service, which charge for the use of any microform; the Carmarthenshire Archives Service, the Dudley Archives and Local History Service, and Wolverhampton Archives and Local Studies (which charge for the use of GRO indexes); and Liverpool Record Office and Local History Library, which has an advance booking fee of 50p for the use of microform.
18. From personal observation in a busy family history searchroom, it is not so much social class or level of education which affect customers' ability to use sources, as much as their willingness to listen and

learn. However, users with serious literacy problems can present difficulties to searchroom staff. A lack of familiarity with alphabetical or numerical order, for example, can wreak havoc with self-service systems.

19. An article in a recent issue of *JSA* hints at frustration with this attitude. A plea for debate over appraisal policies remarks that, 'Archivists spend a lot of their time messing about with things like boxes, paper clips and office filing ...' (Michael Gasson, 'Business Archives: some principles and practices', *JSA*, vol 18 (1997), p 149.
20. Society of Archivists, *Recommendations for British Local Government Archive Services*, 1971, reprinted as Appendix A in Cook, p 202.
21. Patricia J. Methven, 'Performance measurement and standards', *JSA*, vol 11 (1990), p 84.
22. Local Government Act, 1972, chapter 70, section 224; Local Government (Wales) Act, 1994, chapter 19, section 60.
23. The Law of Property (Amendment) Act, 15 & 16 Geo. V chapter 5; The Public Records Act, 6 & 7 Eliz. II chapter 51; the Parochial Registers and Records Measure, 1978, No. 2.
24. The Local Government (Records) Act, 10 & 11 Eliz. II, c. 56.
25. 10 & 11 Eliz. II, chapter. 56, section 1.
26. Figures given in the 1992 survey of local authority archive services reveal that over half the services responding to the questionnaire were responsible to leisure/libraries departments (Forbes, Table 1, p 1).
27. Ann Pederson, 'User Education and Public Relations', in J. Ellis (ed.), *Keeping Archives* (Melbourne, 1993), p 306.
28. Ian Wilson, 'Strategies for Communication', *JSA*, vol 16 (1995), p 68.
29. National Council on Archives, *An Archives Policy for the United Kingdom* (London, 1996), p 3.
30. See, for example, the anonymous Comment, 'Archives, heritage and leisure', *JSA*, vol 14 (1993), p 110.

## Appendix 1.

### Questionnaire on sources and services provided for family historians by local authority record offices

Please tick relevant boxes or give relevant information in the space provided.

NAME OF RECORD OFFICE .....

Where an archives service has branch offices, separate questionnaires are being sent to each branch office; if the questionnaire is completed by the main office only, and answers relate to all branches, please indicate this above.

#### 1. Statistics

1. What was the total number of searcher visits made to your office in 1996 (calendar year)? .....
2. Of these visits, approximately what percentage were made by family historians (if known)? .....

#### 2. Sources provided for family historians

Have you acquired any of the following for the use of family historians?

	Yes	No
1. Census returns 1841-91 for the area covered by your office	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. The International Genealogical Index	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. General Register Office indexes of births, marriages and deaths	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. 1881 census personal name index for the whole of England and Wales	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

#### 3. Services provided for family historians

Do you provide any of the following services?

	Yes	No
1. Postal research service (free)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Postal research service (paid)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Leaflets giving general guidance to family historians, or describing genealogical sources available in your office	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Family history courses, open days, or fairs (organised principally by the record office, not a family history society)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**4. Charges**

What charge (if any) do you make for

- 1. Postal research services .....
- 2. Use of family history sources in the search room? .....

**5. Attitudes and policies towards family historians**

If you have time, I would be grateful for any comments here. If you don't have time, or don't wish to comment, please disregard this question.

At one extreme, family historians can be seen as a nuisance, diverting staff from the 'proper' work of a record office; at the other, they can be regarded as the most important of record office user groups, whose needs should be paramount. I suspect that most record offices fall somewhere between these two extremes, but I am aware that there is a wide variation in attitudes between individual archivists, and a difference in policy between offices.

I would be grateful for any comments here on the way family historians are viewed in your office, and whether you feel that local authority record offices should be catering for the needs of family historians—for example by acquiring sources such as the General Register Office indexes—or whether these needs are better met by other institutions.

**Appendix 2.**

**List of repositories to which questionnaires were sent**

Repositories listed in brackets did not respond to the questionnaire. In two cases, questionnaires sent to branch offices were answered jointly with the questionnaire sent to the main office.

Names of offices, and classification by type of local authority, are given as at the time of the survey, ie May–June 1997.

**England: counties**

- Berkshire Record Office
- Buckinghamshire Record Office
- Cambridgeshire Heritage. County Record Office, Cambridge
- Cambridgeshire Heritage. County Record Office, Huntingdon
- Cheshire Record Office
- Cornwall Record Office
- (Cumbria Archive Service, Carlisle)
- Cumbria Archive Service. Cumbria Record Office, Kendal
- Cumbria Record Office and Local Studies Library, Whitehaven
- Devon Record Office, Exeter
- North Devon Record Office, Barnstaple
- West Devon Record Office, Plymouth
- (Derbyshire Record Office)
- Dorset Record Office
- Durham Record Office
- East Sussex Record Office
- Essex Record Office, Chelmsford
- Essex Record Office, Colchester & N. E. Essex Branch
- Essex Record Office, Southend Branch
- Gloucestershire Record Office
- Hampshire Record Office
- Hereford & Worcester Record Office, Worcester
- Hereford & Worcester Record Office, Hereford Branch
- Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies
- (Humberside County Archives Office, Beverley)
- Centre for Kentish Studies, Maidstone
- South East Kent Archives Office, Folkestone Library
- Rochester upon Medway City Archives

Sevenoaks Archives Office  
Thanet Branch Archive, Ramsgate  
Lancashire Record Office  
Leicestershire Record Office  
Lincolnshire Archives  
Norfolk Record Office  
North Yorkshire County Record Office  
Northamptonshire Record Office  
Northumberland Archives Service, Northumberland Record Office } Joint response  
Northumberland Archives Service, Morpeth Record Centre }  
Northumberland Archives Service, Berwick-upon-Tweed Record Office  
Nottinghamshire Archives  
Oxfordshire Archives  
Shropshire Records and Research Service  
Somerset Record Office  
Suffolk Libraries and Heritage, Bury St. Edmunds Record Office  
Suffolk Libraries and Heritage, Ipswich Record Office  
Suffolk Libraries and Heritage, Lowestoft Record Office  
Surrey History Service. Surrey Record Office } Joint response  
Surrey History Service. Guildford Muniment Room }  
Warwickshire County Record Office  
West Sussex Record Office

**England: joint authorities**

Bedfordshire and Luton Archives and Record Service  
Cleveland County Archives Department  
Greater Manchester County Record Office  
Merseyside Record Office  
Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Archives Service, Lichfield Record Office  
Tyne and Wear Archives Service  
West Yorkshire Archives Service, Bradford  
West Yorkshire Archives Service, Calderdale  
West Yorkshire Archives Service, Kirklees  
West Yorkshire Archives Service, Leeds  
West Yorkshire Archives Service, Wakefield  
Wiltshire and Swindon Record Office

**England: metropolitan district councils**

Barnsley Archives and Local Studies  
Birmingham City Archives  
Bolton Archive & Local Studies Service  
Bury Archives Service  
Coventry City Archives  
Doncaster Archives  
Dudley Archives and Local History Service  
Knowsley Libraries & Archives  
Liverpool Record Office and Local History Library  
Manchester Local Studies Unit  
Oldham Local Studies Library & Archives Service  
(Rochdale Local Studies Library)  
Rotherham Archives and Local Studies Section  
Salford Archives Centre  
Sandwell Community History & Archives Service  
Sheffield Archives  
St. Helen's Local History & Archives Library  
Stockport Archives Service  
Tameside Local Studies Library  
Walsall Local History Centre  
Wigan Archives Service

Wirral Archives Service  
Wolverhampton Archives & Local Studies

**England: unitary authorities**

(Bath City Record Office)  
Bristol Record Office  
Hull City Archives  
Isle of Wight Record Office  
North East Lincolnshire Archives [formerly South Humberside]  
Portsmouth City Museum & Records Office  
Southampton Archives Service  
(York City Archives)

**England: county district**

Chester Archives

**London**

London Metropolitan Archives  
Guildhall Library, Manuscripts Section  
Barnet Archives & Local Studies Department  
Bexley Local Studies Centre  
(Brent Community History Library and Archive)  
Bromley Archives  
Camden Local Studies & Archives Centre  
Croyden Archives Service  
Greenwich Local History Library  
Hackney Archives Department  
Hammersmith & Fulham Archives and Local History Centre  
Haringey Archives Service  
Lambeth Archives Department  
Lewisham Local Studies and Archives  
(Newham Local Studies Library)  
Sutton Heritage Service Archives Section  
Tower Hamlets Local History and Archives  
Waltham Forest Archives and Local History Library  
City of Westminster Archives Centre

**Wales**

Anglesey County Record Office  
Carmarthenshire Archives Service  
Ceredigion Archives  
Denbighshire Record Office  
Flintshire Record Office  
Glamorgan Record Office  
Gwent Record Office  
Gwynedd Archives Service, Caernarfon  
Gwynedd Archives Service, Dolgellau  
Pembrokeshire Record Office  
Powys County Archive Service  
West Glamorgan Archive Service

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